



THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

The Employee Assistance Program to help you manage your most valuable resource— Employees

Call EAS: Olympia (360) 753-3260 Seattle (206) 281-6315 Spokane (509) 482-3686

Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. We referred an employee to EAS for sexual harassment issues. The employee has been disciplined and knows he could be terminated with a second offense. Isn't that deterrence enough?

A. A firm management response often prevents a second offense of sexual harassment by an employee. If an employee has difficulty controlling impulsive behavior or has a long history of personal issues that are contributing to inappropriate behavior, something more may be needed. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) help employees examine any contributing factors to sexual harassment behavior. Sometimes the only factors are problematic social skills. In other situations, more complex issues may contribute to an employee's inability to control behavior. For one employee, education and awareness may be the intervention of choice. For another, professional counseling or intensive treatment may be needed for a variety of treatable health issues that can lead to behavior problems in the workplace. EAPs have discovered that many employees are willing to accept such help with an incalculable cost-benefit to the organization.

■ Q. If I have an employee with job performance problems, why wouldn't my insistence that he or she get help for a personal problem, if one exists, be as effective as a visit with EAS? If I can't motivate the employee, how can EAS?

A. Employees may become defensive and focus on proving the supervisor wrong. This makes it unlikely that the employee will acknowledge performance problems and follow a simple directive to seek help. With a formal supervisor referral this dynamic changes. The trained and experienced EA professional can use appropriate motivational counseling techniques. Many studies have demonstrated that clients who are initially resistant are nevertheless capable of superior outcomes from the counseling process. This is a major benefit of referring to EAS. Your EA professionals initially attempt to nurture whatever motivation a client brings to the interview. The goal is to help the employee see that the gains of cooperating outweigh the pain and negative outcomes of failing to do so. These EA Professional skills, along with assurances of confidentiality, can motivate employees while the supervisor focuses on job performance issues.

■ Q. Some of my employees are more productive than others. Assuming none of them have personal problems interfering with their productivity, what explains differences in motivation? What is my role in helping them be as productive as possible?

A. Employee motivation is a broad subject of study. Two employees equally capable of producing the same amount of work may respond to different motivators. One employee may be internally motivated by the rewards of success in accomplishing goals, while another employee may accomplish the same goals, but draw his motivation from the fear of failure. Most employees have a balance of these two motivational tracks, but favor one over the other. It is natural that a management/supervision style may favor one of these employee types over the other, but it is best to try and find a balance to match your employees. Examining your management style (whether it is reward and praise oriented, or consequence and discipline oriented) can give clues to improvements in helping motivate your employees. If you encounter difficulties in changing your style, EAS may be able to help you discover why and find resources to support your goal of personal balance and change.

■ Q. An employee failed to complete a major project on time causing many problems for the agency. I referred him to EAS, but I'm having difficulty regaining trust for this employee. Can an EA Professional advise us on when we can trust the employee again?

A. The EA Professional can work with your employee to resolve personal problems that may have contributed to his or her failure to complete a project on time, but cannot recommend when you should resume a trusting work relationship with him. This would take responsibility for an administrative decision out of your hands and assign it to the EAP. It would violate the boundaries of the EAP's role. If your employee signed a release that permits the EAP to inform you of his follow-through with its recommendations, you may choose to use this feedback to build trust with your employee again. However, this would be exclusively your decision. You will find that trust is normally rebuilt on a foundation of continued job performance with closer supervision. This process takes time, but can be presented to the employee as an opportunity to show what he or she can do.

■ Q. What role does EAS play in increasing employee commitment to our organization?

A. Most employees do not disclose their participation with EAS, particularly to their managers. Management may not hear how important EAS is to employees or how appreciative many are of the fact that the organization offers such a service. This in turn increases loyalty and commitment to the organization. EA professionals frequently hear how thankful employees are that the agency sponsors an employee assistance program. Occasionally some employees with performance problems and personal troubles falsely believe that the organization is "out to get them" until they visit the EA Professional. This is often the turning point in recognizing their contribution to the difficulties they face with the organization. What often follows is not only a willingness to resolve personal problems, but also more commitment to the employer and the work unit. The employee comes to believe that the organization does have a stake in his or her success. Consider inviting EAS into your next staff meeting to familiarize your employees with their services and staff.

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Visit EAS on our website at:
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